

THE TRUST QUESTION

ADDRESS DELIVERED BY MR. BRYAN AT INDIANAPOLIS, AUGUST 25

Nowhere does the republican party show its indifference to real reform more than in its treatment of the trust question. Here is the republican platform:

"The republican party passed the Sherman anti-trust law over democratic opposition and enforced it after democratic dereliction. It has been a wholesome instrument for good in the hands of a wise and fearless administration. But experience has shown that its effectiveness can be strengthened and its real objects better attained by such amendments as will give to the federal government greater supervision and control over, and secure greater publicity in, the management of that class of corporations engaged in interstate commerce, having power and opportunity to affect monopolies."

The Sherman anti-trust law was passed eighteen years ago; it has a criminal clause which provides a penitentiary punishment for those who conspire together in restraint of trade. Ever since the enactment of the law, with the exception of four years, the republican party has controlled the executive department of the government, and, during two years of the four, it controlled the house of representatives. Instead of democratic dereliction, the democratic party has been urging, year after year, the strict enforcement of that law, and the republican party has been explaining year after year why it was impossible to enforce it. Instead of being a "wholesome instrument for good," it has been almost useless, so far as the protection of the public is concerned, for the trusts have grown in number, in strength, and in arrogance, at the very time when the republican party was boasting of its enforcement of the law. The steel trust was formed immediately after the election of 1900, and a prominent republican said, in a speech soon after, that it might have prevented a republican victory if it had been formed before the election.

Most of the trusts have never been disturbed, and those that have been prosecuted have not had their business seriously interrupted. The president has done something toward the enforcement of the law, but not nearly enough, and the republican leaders have thwarted him at every point. Finally the president became so exasperated that he sent to congress a message which shocked republican leaders by the fierceness of its denunciation of the predatory interests. The very convention that spoke in its platform of the administration as "a wise and fearless one," was composed largely of the senators and members of congress who boldly opposed every effort to free the people from the clutches of the favor-seeking corporations.

The republican platform says that experience has shown that the effectiveness of the anti-trust law could be strengthened by amendments which will give the federal government greater supervision and control over, and greater publicity as to, the management of those interstate commerce corporations which have the power and opportunity to affect monopolies. That is all. No pointing out of remedies; no outlining of a plan for more effective legislation—simply a general statement that promises nothing in particular. And Mr. Taft's speech of acceptance is even weaker than the platform. He gives no evidence of having studied the question or of comprehending the iniquities of a monopoly. You look in vain in his notification speech for any sign of indignation at what the trusts have been doing or for evidence of zeal in their prosecution. He has, for several years, been the intimate official companion of the president, but he has caught none of the fire which the president manifested in his message of last January.

If, in the presence of an aroused people, and in the heat of a campaign, the republican party contents itself with a colorless platform on this subject, what can we expect in the way of activity when the exigencies of the campaign are passed? If, when Mr. Taft is appealing to the Roosevelt republicans, his discussion of the subject is so lifeless and his manner so apologetic and apathetic, what reason have we to expect either vigor in the enforcement of the law or earnestness in the search for additional remedies?

In his speech delivered about a year ago announcing his candidacy Mr. Taft suggested that the present law be so amended as to permit "reasonable" restraint of trade. Such an amendment would be as absurd as an amendment to the law against burglary limiting the law to cases in which more than two burglars entered the house at one time or took more than half they found. In his notification speech he suggests national incorporation—a remedy which would make conditions worse because, without adding to the power of congress to prevent monopolies, it would deprive the states of the power to protect their own people.

Now, let me contrast the democratic platform with the republican platform.

Nowhere is the difference in the temper of the parties more noticeable; nowhere is the difference in the method of dealing with questions more manifest. Our platform says:

"A private monopoly is indefensible and intolerable. We therefore favor the vigorous enforcement of the criminal law against guilty trust magnates and officials, and demand the enactment of such additional legislation as may be necessary to make it impossible for a private monopoly to exist in the United States. Among the additional remedies, we specify three: First, a law preventing a duplication of directors among competing corporations; second, a license system which will, without abridging the right of each state to create corporations, or its right to regulate as it will foreign corporations doing business within its limits, make it necessary for a manufacturing or trading corporation engaged in interstate commerce to take out a federal license before it shall be permitted to control as much as twenty-five per cent of the product in which it deals, the license to protect the public from watered stock and to prohibit the control by such corporation of more than fifty per cent of the total amount of any product consumed in the United States; and, third, a law compelling such licensed corporations to sell to all purchasers in all parts of the country on the same terms, after making due allowance for cost of transportation."

Here is a plain, candid statement of the party's position. There is no quibbling, no evasion, no ambiguity. A private monopoly is indefensible and intolerable. It is bad—bad in principle, and bad in practice. No apology can be offered for it, and no people should endure it. Our party's position is entirely in harmony with the position of Jefferson. With a knowledge of human nature which few men have equalled and none surpassed, and with extraordinary foresight, he expressed unalterable opposition to every form of private monopoly. The student of history will find that upon this subject, as upon other subjects of government, the great founder of the democratic party took his position upon the side of the whole people and against those who seek to make a private use of government, or strive to secure special privileges at the expense of the public.

I have, in discussing the tariff question, presented one of our remedies, namely, the removal of the tariff from imports which compete with trust made goods. This, we believe, would greatly lessen the extortion practiced by the trusts and bring about the dissolution of many monopolistic combines. But we are not satisfied merely with the lessening of extortion or with the dissolution of some of the trusts.

Because the private monopoly is indefensible and intolerable, the democratic party favors its extermination. It pledges itself to the vigorous enforcement of the criminal law against trust magnates and officials. It is impossible for the republican party to enforce the present criminal law against trust officials; these officials are intimately connected with the republican party in the present campaign. Take, for instance, the chairman of the republican speaker's committee, Mr. Dupont, of Delaware. He is the defendant in a suit which the government brought and is now prosecuting. Mr. Dupont is charged with violation of the anti-trust law. Why should he be put on the executive committee and then be given control of the speaking part of the campaign? If you talk to a republican leader about penitentiary punishment for offenders, he favors fining the corporation on the ground that it is impossible to convict individuals, but when you urge fines you are told that fines are unjust to innocent stockholders. We favor both fine and imprisonment, but we think it is better to prevent monopolies than to first authorize them to prey upon the public and then try to punish them for doing so. Mr. Taft favors control of trusts instead of extermination, but after years of experience the people have learned that the trusts control the government.

Our platform does not stop with the enforcement of the law; it demands the enactment of such additional legislation as may be necessary to make it impossible for a private monopoly to exist in the United States.

The democratic party does not content itself with a definition of the wrong or with a denunciation of it. It proceeds to outline remedies. The first is a law preventing a duplication of directors among competing corporations. No one can object to this remedy unless he is in sympathy with the trusts, rather than with the people who are victimized by the trusts. There is no easier way of stifling competition than to make one board of directors serve for a number of competing corporations. It is not necessary for corporations to enter into an agreement for the restraint of trade if the corpora-